

## Is there a time gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2?<sup>1</sup>

The first two verses (and sentences) of Scripture read: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." How do these two statements relate to each other?

Traditionally it has been explained this way. "The first verse serves as a broad, comprehensive statement of the fact of creation. Verse two describes the earth as it came from the hands of the

Creator and as it existed at the time when God commanded the light to shine forth."<sup>1</sup> Since Exodus 20:11 informs us that "in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them," verse two of Genesis 1 is part of the first day. It is also clear from the same passage that the beginning of the creation work of God (referred to in Genesis 1:1) was on that first day as well.

### The gap theory

Early in the nineteenth century, the so-called gap theory was set forth under the pressures of the rise of modern science and the apparent necessity to harmonize what seemed to be scientific truth with the text of Scripture. In its barest essentials this theory postulates a large time gap between verses 1 and 2 of the first chapter of Genesis. During this time gap, the perfect creation of verse 1 was ruined,

presumably by the fall of Satan. This ruined earth is pictured in verse 2. The conditions there described were caused by God's judgment in the form of a flood, followed by a global ice-age when the light and the heat from the sun were somehow removed. All the fossils, be they of plants, animals or humans, which are found on the earth today date from that destructive time period. These fossils do not bear any genetic relationship with life as now found on the earth. Proponents of this theory "have almost uniformly appealed to it for the harmonization of huge quantities of time required by evolutionary scientists and the rather recent creation Genesis seems to present."<sup>2</sup> With the first world ruined, a subsequent restoration was needed. This we find recorded beginning with Genesis 1:3.

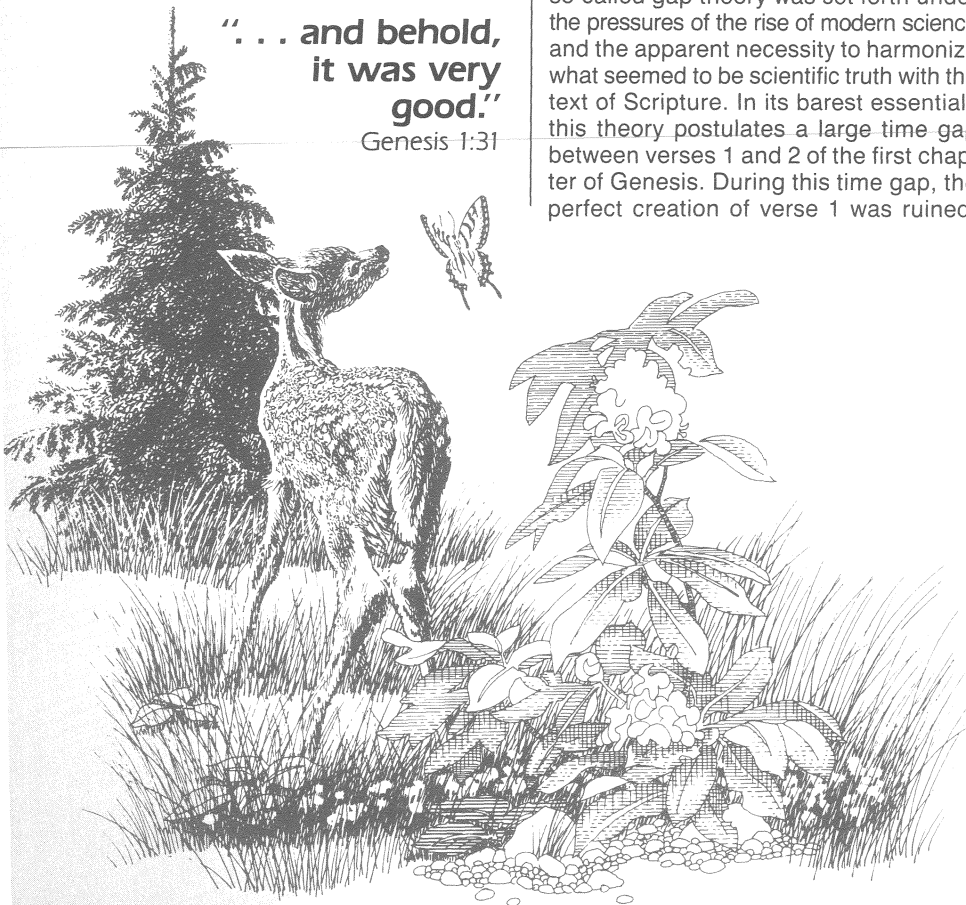
What are the arguments for such a time gap? Since this is a rather popular theory, let us consider the arguments one by one and weigh each one as to its validity.<sup>3</sup>

### "To create" and "to make"

The first argument for the gap theory that can be mentioned is that according to the proponents of this theory, the Hebrew verb meaning "to create" must be rigidly separated from the Hebrew verb "to make." "To create" means to make from nothing and "to make" never means that, but only refers to making out of material that is already present. (The verb "to form" is also grouped with "to make" in this context.) It is then argued that in Genesis 1:1 we read: "In the beginning God *created* heaven and earth," but that elsewhere it says: "in six days the LORD *made* heaven and earth" (Exodus 20:11; also see Genesis 2:1-3); that is, God then prepared the heavens and the earth from material that was at hand. According to this argument, Genesis 1:1 therefore describes a completely different event from that recounted in verses 3 and following in the same chapter. Genesis 1:1 does

**"... and behold,  
it was very  
good."**

Genesis 1:31



not speak of the work of God described in Genesis 1:3-2:3, but relates to an earlier work of God, a world that had been *created* before the present world was *made* from the ruined first world.

The question of course arises whether such a rigid distinction can be made between "to create" and "to make" (and "to form"). The answer is no. The evidence is as follows. Although it is true, as we have seen in the preceding article, that the verb "to create" expresses better than any other word the idea of an absolute creation, a making from nothing, yet, we should not drive a wedge or artificial division between "to create" and "to make." After all, both are used of God's work with respect to the origin of the world. Scripture must be compared with Scripture. When this is done, then the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the statement "God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) and the statement "the LORD made the heaven and the earth" (Exodus 20:11) both refer to the same event and not to two different events. The reason for this conclusion is that the verbs "to create" and "to make" are used interchangeably in speaking of God's creation work.

This interchangeability can be demonstrated from Genesis 1 and 2. About the creation of man we read: "Let us *make* man" (Genesis 1:26); "God *created* man" (Genesis 1:27) and compare also "the LORD God *formed* man" (Genesis 2:7). Although with the creation of man there are different connotations of the verbs used (cf. Genesis 2:7), there is an interchangeable usage. Similarly we read that "God *created* the great sea monsters" (Genesis 1:21) and that "God *made* the beasts of the earth" (Genesis 1:25). Here too the terms are used interchangeably. When God called the sea creatures into being (Genesis 1:20), He created (Genesis 1:21). When He called the creatures of the earth into being (Genesis 1:24), He made them (Genesis 1:25). This synonymous usage is also found in Genesis 2:4. "These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were *created*, in the day when the LORD God *made* the earth and the heaven." So, just from Genesis 1 and 2 it is already evident that "to create" and "to make" are used interchangeably. This can also be demonstrated from elsewhere in the Old Testament,<sup>4</sup> but let this suffice.

The other Old Testament passages that speak of creation must be interpreted within the light of Genesis 1 and 2 as we have just seen it. When, therefore, the fourth commandment speaks of God's making the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, then this refers to what we read in Genesis 1:1-2:25. That is the only creation work that Scripture

speaks of. And when Ezra said "Thou art the LORD, Thou alone; Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them" (Nehemiah 9:6), then this too refers to the same creation work of God. There are not two creation works, namely Genesis 1:1 and then separate from that what follows in Genesis 1 and 2.

### Sequential action?

A second argument used to plead for a time gap between the first two verses of Genesis is that verse 2 starts in the Hebrew with "and" and thus represents sequential action. First what is described in verse 1 occurred and then later what we read in verse 2. First God created the heaven and the earth and then (according to this argument) verse 2 literally reads, "And the earth *became* without form and void." This rendering thus indicates that there is a time gap between these verses.

In response, it should be noted that translating "and" is misreading the Hebrew.<sup>5</sup> According to Hebrew grammar, something that happened subsequently would be expressed by the following order: "and" + verb + subject. That is the normal narrative order in a verbal clause. Here in Genesis 1:2 however the order is "and" + subject + verb. This is the order used for circumstantial clauses. Such a clause describes the condition or circumstance. In this case, verse 2 describes the earth as God originally created it. These were the circumstances and condition when God had called the earth into being and when He created light. Verse 2, therefore, does not describe how the earth became at some time after the creation of everything.

In light of the above, it is with good

reason that the Revised Standard Version leaves out "and" in its translation of this verse. In this way any wrong impression can be avoided, such as that something happened subsequent to verse 1. The New International Version translates: "Now the earth was formless and empty." This gets the disjunctive, explanatory sense of the Hebrew "and" across.

Connected with this treatment of "and" is the desire by gap theory adherents to translate "was" in verse 2 ("the earth was without form and void) by "became" or "had become." "And the earth became (or 'had become') without form and void." In this way the idea of sequence in time is conveyed. However, such a translation is without any foundation. In circumstantial clauses the verb "to be" functions as a copula and is for that reason often omitted. Here it is included to stress that this is how it was in the beginning, at the time of God's creation work of the first day.

Two other important arguments for a time gap have been put forward. We hope to consider these as well as other factors in understanding verse 2 the next time.

C. VAN DAM

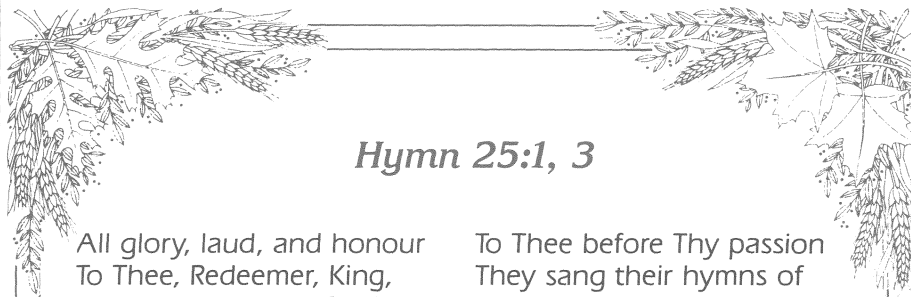
<sup>1</sup> E.J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (1964), 14.

<sup>2</sup> W.W. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled* (1976), 8. Also see p.7

<sup>3</sup> For an extensive treatment of all the arguments, see *ibid.*, 51-146. What follows in this and in the next article is in part indebted to this work.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-71

<sup>5</sup> For more precise and technical information on what follows in very popular terminology in this article, see Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar* as ed. and enlarged by E. Kautzsch, 2nd ed. rev. A.E. Cowley (1910, 1966), sec. 156a, 141e,i; P. Jouon, *Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique* (1923, 1982), sec. 154m.



### Hymn 25:1, 3

All glory, laud, and honour  
To Thee, Redeemer, King,  
To whom the lips of children  
Made loud hosannas ring.  
Thou art the King of Israel,  
Thou, David's royal Son,  
Who in the Lord's Name  
comest,  
The King and Blessed One.

To Thee before Thy passion  
They sang their hymns of  
praise;  
To Thee, now high exalted,  
Our melody we raise.  
Thou didst accept their praises;  
Accept the prayers we bring,  
Who in all good delightest,  
Thou good and gracious King.